

II. CLAIM AMENDMENTS

1. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for accounting for the consumption of postal resources comprising:

a memory for providing a value indicative of the consumption of postal resources;

a processor for generating at least one record including data related to the consumption of the postal resources;

an output device for transmitting the at least one record related to the consumption of the postal resources to a data center, characterized in that said output device transmits said at least one record responsive to a request from the data center for the at least one record; and by

a settlement center adapted to receive a request for funds transfer from the data center based on the at least one record and to arrange for a transfer of corresponding funds from a user account to an account associated with the postal resources, and to notify said data center comprising a computer system communication with a franking system that the transfer had been made and wherein said memory only includes an ascending register and no descending register;

wherein no credited funds for postage are stored in or transferred to the memory.

2-19. (Cancelled)

20. (Currently Amended) A system for assessing charges for consumptions of at least first and second different resources, the system comprising:

- a communication apparatus for communicating with at least first and second devices, the first device providing a first measure of consumption of the first resource, the second device providing a measure of consumption of the second, different resource;
- a processor for determining first charges based on the first measure of consumption of the first resource, and second charges based on the second measure of consumption of the second, different resource;
- a transmitter for providing first information concerning the first charges and a first account associated with the first device, and second information concerning the second charges and a second account associated with the second device for settlement of the first and second charges; and
- a settlement center adapted to receive a request for funds transfer from the data center based on the at least one record and to arrange for a transfer of corresponding funds from a user account to an account associated with the postal resources, and to notify said data center comprising a computer system communication with a franking system that the transfer had been made and wherein said memory only includes an ascending register and no descending register;

wherein no credited funds for postage are stored in or transferred to the memory.

21. (Original) The system of claim 20 wherein the first and second resources include different utility resources.

22. (Original) The system of claim 20 wherein the first resource includes a postal service.

23. (Original) The system of claim 22 wherein the second resource includes a utility resource.

24. (Original) The system of claim 23 wherein the utility resource is a natural gas resource.

25. (Original) The system of claim 23 wherein the utility resource is an electric resource.

26. (Original) The system of claim 22 wherein the first device provides at least an amount of postage dispensed for the postal service.

27. (Original) The system of claim 22 wherein the first device includes a processor for generating at least part of a postage indicium.

28. (Original) The system of claim 22 wherein the first device includes a controller for generating at least part of a postage indicium.

29. (Currently Amended) A method for use in an apparatus for processing charges for consumption of postal resources:

forming at least one record in memory of a postage dispensing device indicating a value of the postal resource consumed the memory only including records of the postal resources consumed and not any stored value for postal resources to be consumed;

electronically transmitting the at least one record to a data center for processing;

electronically transmitting a request for payment of the consumed postal service to a settlement center wherein a transfer of funds is effected between a user's account and an account associated with the postal resource; and

electronically notifying the data center that the funds transfer is made;

wherein no credited funds for postage are stored in or transferred to the memory.

30. (Original) The method of claim 29 wherein each record also includes an indicator indicative of a truncation of the value.

31. (Original) The method of claim 29 wherein the consumption of the resource includes utilization of a postal service, and the individual measure includes postage dispensed for the utilization of the postal service.

32. (Original) The method of claim 31 wherein each record is associated with a different transaction of postage dispensation.

33. (Original) The method of claim 32 wherein the time information in each record is indicated by an index identifying the transaction associated with the record.

34. (Original) The method of claim 32 wherein the time information in each record concerns a time of the transaction associated with the record.

35. (Original) The method of claim 31 further generating at least part of a postage indicium.

36. (Original) The method of claim 29 wherein the consumption includes a utility consumption.

37-38. (Cancelled)

39. (Currently Amended) A method for use in an arrangement for processing charges for consumptions of at least one resource, the consumptions being measured using a plurality of devices, each device being associated with a different financial account, the arrangement including a first system and a second system, the method comprising:

forming at least one record from each device, each record including at least a measure of a consumption of the

resource each device not storing funds to account for consumption of resources as they are consumed;

determining, for each device, charges for the consumption of the resource based on a subset of the records received from the device; and

transmitting, for each device, the charges and information concerning the financial account associated with the device to the first system for settlement of the charges, and for transmitting the at least one record associated with the device to the second system for storage and effecting a transfer of funds between a user's account and an account associated with the resource in a staggered manner-;

wherein no credited funds for postage are stored in or transferred to the plurality of devices.

40. (Original) The method of claim 39 further comprising re-allocating the resource based on statistics derived from the records stored in the second system.

41. (Original) The method of claim 39 wherein the measure of the consumption of the resource in each record includes an amount of individual postage dispensed for utilization of a postal service.

42. (Original) The method of claim 41 wherein each record also includes a value indicative of cumulative postage dispensed, the value taking into account the amount of the individual postage in the record.

43. (Original) The method of claim 42 wherein each record also includes an indicator indicative of a truncation of the value.

44. (Original) The method of claim 41 wherein each record is associated with a different transaction of postage dispensation.

45. (Original) The method of claim 39 wherein the plurality of records include more than two records, and the subset of the records includes two selected records.

46. (Original) The method of claim 39 wherein the resource includes a utility resource.

47. (Original) The method of claim 39 further comprising cryptographically processing the plurality or records.

48. (Original) The method of claim 47 wherein the plurality of records are cryptographically signed to authenticate the records.

49. (Currently Amended) A method for use in a system for assessing charges for consumptions of at least first and second different resources, the system including at least first and second devices, the first device providing a first measure of consumption of the first resource, the second device providing a measure of consumption of the second, different resource, the method comprising:

receiving from the first device the first measure of consumption of the first resource, and from the second device the second measure of consumption of the second, different resource the first device and the second device each not storing funds to account for consumption of resources as they are consumed;

determining first charges based on the first measure of consumption of the first resource and second charges based on the second measure of consumption of the second, different resource; and

providing first information concerning the first charges and a first account associated with the first device, and second information concerning the second charges and a second account associated with the second device for settlement of the first and second charges-;

wherein, no credited funds for postage are stored in or transferred to the first device or second device.

50. (Original) The method of claim 49 wherein the first and second resources include different utility resources.

51. (Original) The method of claim 49 wherein the first resource includes a postal service.

52. (Original) The method of claim 51 wherein the second resource includes a utility resource.

53. (Original) The method of claim 52 wherein the utility resource is a natural gas resource.

54. (Original) The method of claim 52 wherein the utility resource is an electric resource.

55. (Original) The method of claim 51 wherein the first charges include an amount of postage dispensed for the postal service.

56. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising said memory including an ascending register and no descending register.

57. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the consumption of the postal resources includes postage dispensed for the utilization of a postal service.

58. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein each record is associated with a different transaction of postage dispensation.

59. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 57 further comprising a controller for generating at least part of a postage indicium.

60. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein a postal security device is used to dispense postal indicia and the

memory monitors the value of the postal indicia dispensed and the processor uses the value of the postal indicia dispensed and at least a time that each postal indicia is dispensed to generate the at least one record.

61. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 60 wherein the postal security device includes only an ascending register to monitor postal indicia dispensed.

62. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 60 wherein the postal security device does not include a descending register adapted to monitor a level of funds remaining available for a dispensing of postal indicia.

63. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the data center is adapted to communicate with more than one system providing postal resources.

64. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 63 wherein each system is a franking system adapted to generate postal indicia and the data center receives records from each franking system reflecting a value of postal indicia generated.

65. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 64 wherein each franking system does not store funds for generating postal indicia.

66. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 64 wherein the data center controls each franking system's ability to generate postal indicia based on an indication from the settlement center that a funds transfer has been made.

67. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 29 further comprising the transfer of funds being effected between the user's account and an account associated with the postal resource in a staggered manner.

68. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 29 wherein the forming of at least one record comprises retrieving a value of postal indicia generated from an ascending register of a postal security device.

69. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 68 wherein the postal security device does not include a register of funds available for generating postal indicia and receives authority to generate postal indicia from the data center.

70. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 29 wherein the data center receives records from a plurality of postal resource systems and sorts the records based on each respective postal resource system.

71. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 29 wherein the data center controls an ability of each postal resource to dispense postal resources.

72. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 29 further comprising communicating a payment record to a postal authority detailing each postage indicia generation transaction for verification, wherein the postal authority is adapted to audit the payment record.